

The Future of North Korea:
Scenarios and Implications for the United States Army

by

Darrell Hugh Zemitis

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Committee in charge:

Professor Hong Y. Lee, Chair
Professor (Emeritus) Robert A. Scalapino
Professor Steven Weber

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PART I: THE FUTURE OF NORTH KOREA

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Introduction:

For nearly the past ten years the economy of North Korea has been in a state of steady decline. Flaws in the highly centralized, command economy of this isolated nation initially spurred this economic decline. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the dismantling of the Cold-War structure in Northeast Asia resulted in the loss of one of North Korea's key trading partners and equipment suppliers, further compounding this downward spiral. The final blow for the North Korean economy has been the years of successive flooding and drought since 1995 that have lead to nationwide food shortages, famine, and the reported deaths of hundreds of thousands of North Koreans.

These mounting difficulties have lead the North Korean government to request hundreds of thousands of tons in international food aid in recent years to feed its starving populace. The flow of refugees and defectors into neighboring countries such as China, Russia, and South Korea has slowly been increasing. Evidence of severe infrastructure deterioration and the widespread lack of such basic services as electricity and water have been reported as well. All of these factors have heightened the interest of North Korea experts and analysts and lead to increasing speculation about the future of this internationally isolated, often unpredictable, regime. The future of North Korea is of particular interest to the United States because of the highly militarized nature of North Korean society, the proximity of North Korea to the 37,000 US soldiers that are stationed

in South Korea, and the nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities that the North Koreans are known to possess.

The current situation in North Korea appears outwardly to be growing increasingly unstable, and the fate of the regime has grown increasingly more uncertain. As a result of this current situation, and the threat that North Korea poses to US interests as well as to the entire region, there has been a growing body of scholarly literature in recent years pertaining to the future of the North Korean regime. Numerous possible future scenarios have been put forth, and the likelihood of the occurrence of such scenarios has been elaborated on to varying degrees. If one examines this body of literature pertaining to the future of North Korea, several distinct scenarios emerge as the most predominant.

Many experts believe that the unstable North Korean regime will be unable to sustain itself or maintain the support of the people and suffer a complete collapse, or implosion, also referred to as a 'hard landing'. Still others believe that the seeds of change are already apparent in North Korea, and that these seeds will lead to the gradual reform and opening of the North, also referred to as a 'soft landing'. And yet other experts espouse theories of adherence to the status quo by North Korea, or a violent lashing out against South Korea precipitated by an internal power struggle or factional turbulence. Although it is clear that no one can predict the future with absolute certainty, it is possible to analyze each scenario carefully, in the light of current events both inside and outside North Korea, and present South Korean and US policies toward North Korea, and make an educated, objective prediction as to the future of this nation. In addition to identifying the most probable future scenario, it is important to determine the

implications that each of these scenarios carries with it for the US military. This ensures that an effective military response can be determined, no matter which situation arises in the future.

Bearing this in mind, my goal in this thesis is two-fold. First, I will set forth the most likely scenarios for the future of North Korea, their characteristics, and indicators of their possible occurrence. After this analysis, I will argue that a 'soft landing' is the most likely future scenario for North Korea, and discuss the evidence that is slowly mounting to support this assertion. It is clear based on both external influences on North Korea, and North Korea's own recent actions in the international arena that a 'soft landing' is the most likely scenario for North Korea's future. My second goal in the writing of this thesis is to identify the critical implications for the US Army if any of these possible future scenarios should occur in North Korea. It is crucial to address each of the likely scenarios, and not just the 'soft landing', because of the still unpredictable nature of the North Korean regime. In identifying these implications, actions can be taken now, and training plans modified, to ensure that no matter what the future of North Korea, the US Army will be prepared to effectively contribute to the restoration of peace on the Korean Peninsula.

B. Plan of the Thesis

In order to make an accurate and intelligent prediction of the future of North Korea, it is necessary to have a thorough understanding of the North Korean system and the way of thinking of the Korean people. In support of this idea, Chapter II will examine the various aspects of North Korean society, to include the nation's founding

ideology: Juch'e; the military; the North Korean economy; and the rise of North Korea's current leader, Kim Jong Il. With a sound understanding of the ideological foundation of North Korea, the nature of its highly militaristic society, its rigidly centralized economy, and the tight control exercised by the current North Korean leader, it is possible to more fully understand the context of the North Korean current situation.

It is this current situation that constitutes Chapter III, 'The Decline of North Korea'. The analysis of this decline will touch upon the major aspects that have led North Korea experts to predict the collapse of North Korea in recent years. Such issues as North Korea's international isolation, economic problems, the details of its years-long famine, and the rise in recent years of defectors and refugees will be presented. Mention will also be made, whenever possible, of the limited reforms that have been implemented in North Korea to date. Although as of yet no single one of these changes has seriously impacted North Korean society, these changes may be the precursors to even greater change in the future. This chapter will complete the background information on North Korea and its predicament.

Building on this background information is Chapter IV, which discusses the most likely possibilities for the future of North Korea. It will examine both the 'hard landing' scenario, which is seen as the least favorable of the likely possibilities, and the 'soft landing', which is becoming an increasingly more likely scenario based on changes on both sides of the demilitarized zone (DMZ). These two scenarios will be explained and presented along with a discussion of possible indicators and characteristics. Additionally, two other less likely scenarios, 'muddling through' and the 'hard landing-explosion'

scenario, will be addressed, as will the reasons behind these scenarios being unlikely to occur.

Chapter V, the focal point of this thesis, outlines the argument in favor of a 'soft landing' for North Korea. Small changes that are becoming increasingly more visible inside North Korea, as well as changes in the North Korea policies of both South Korea and the United States are the primary indicators that a 'soft landing', albeit very slow and gradual, is the most realistic possibility in North Korea's future. Recent developments in North Korea's foreign policy, and in relations between the two Koreas, are clear indicators that a 'soft landing' is in North Korea's future. While it is impossible to determine exactly when such a 'soft landing' will actually occur, the argument that a 'soft landing' is the most likely possibility given current conditions is a strong one.

The second goal of this thesis, that of identifying and elucidating the implications for the US Army that are inherent to each future North Korean scenario, is addressed in the remaining chapters. Chapter VI briefly outlines the current United States Army security strategy in Asia, and highlights the critical concerns that will affect the Army and the actions that it must take in response to each future North Korean scenario. Two such concerns are the role of China in determining the extent of US involvement in North Korea's future, and the possible existence of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles in the North Korean arsenal.

In Chapter VII, the implications and essential tasks for the US Army in dealing with North Korea in the future are discussed, focusing on the two most likely scenarios—the 'hard landing' and the 'soft landing'. The implications for the Army in handling each scenario are markedly different. The former scenario most likely would require the Army

to act as part of a coalition force to quickly establish stability and security in the North, seize control of any nuclear or missile facilities, and oversee the disarming and demobilizing of the North Korean military; and the latter scenario would require the Army to make efforts to increase transparency on its part, participate in military exchanges with North Korea, and implement various confidence building measures. The thesis concludes with comments about the current ability of the Army to respond to either North Korean scenario, and offers recommendations that should be examined and implemented to ensure that the US Army is even better prepared to respond to any contingency that may occur on the Korean Peninsula in the future.

II. UNDERSTANDING NORTH KOREA

A. Introduction

Knowing and understanding the way of thinking and the institutions of North Korea can be a difficult task, given the highly closed and isolated nature of North Korean society. However, it is a task that must be undertaken if one is to fully understand the context of the current hardship that is facing the North Korean people. In this chapter, I hope to establish a firm understanding of such basic aspects of the North Korean regime as ideology, economy, the military, and its leadership. With such an understanding in hand, it is then possible to make realistic predictions as to the future of North Korea.

B. Juch'e Ideology

The political ideology that has served as the foundation of North Korean society for nearly the past fifty years is that of Juch'e. It is an ideology that pervades all aspects of North Korean society, to include the political system, the military, the economy, the education system, as well as North Korean foreign policy. The term Juch'e is composed of two Korean words: *ju* means lord, master, owner; and *ch'e* means the body, the whole, the essence. In Korean the term refers to the basic object, the main constituent, or basis of action. It is often used with the word *song*, meaning character--as in *juch'esong*—to mean acting in accord with one's own judgment.¹ In this light, Juch'e is most often translated as self-reliance, and has come to represent the independence and self-determination of the North Korean people.

¹ Dae-Sook Suh, Kim Il Sung, The North Korean Leader (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) 301.

Kim Il Sung, the former leader of North Korea, first publicly presented the concept of Juch'e in 1955, as North Korea sought to distance itself from the Soviet Union and China, in the years following the Korean War.² This ideology served several purposes for Kim. It was used as a political weapon against the Soviet influenced Yenan faction, as Kim Il Sung sought to consolidate his own power. The concept of Juch'e was also created as a reaction to the personality cult that surrounded Stalin and the ideological split that was occurring between China and the Soviet Union at the time.³ It was a rationale for the authority of Kim Il Sung and was espoused as a uniquely Korean version of Communism that served to set North Korea apart from its former allies. According to Kim, everything that the North Koreans had accomplished, they had done as a result of their own determination and self-reliance, independent of the Soviet Union and China, using the principle of Juch'e.⁴ As the years have passed, this ideology of Juch'e, which initially emerged as a North Korean version of Communism, has gradually changed, becoming the sole justification for the leadership and authority of Kim Il Sung, and now the leadership of his son, Kim Jong Il. Juch'e has evolved into a highly nationalistic ideology, characterized by Kim's own cult of personality and a rigid and unquestioning loyalty that is instilled in the people, and allows them to be strictly controlled.

The guiding principle of Juch'e is made up of several 'sub-principles' that enable this ideology to penetrate nearly all aspects of society. The idea of *chaju*, or political independence, is invaluable if a state is to determine its own future among nations. The concept of *chaju* demands equality among nations and will not stand for the subjugation

² Ibid. 306.

³ David Reese, The Prospects for North Korea's Survival, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 16.

⁴ Suh. 302.

of one nation at the hands of another. Mutual respect and the right to determine the nation's future in order to assure the freedom and prosperity of its people are also characteristics of *chaju*.⁵ It is clear from North Korea's actions at the international bargaining table that the concept of *chaju* continues to heavily influence their actions. *Charip* is the idea of economic self-sustenance. This principle demands a nation that is economically self-sustaining, relying solely on those products that are produced with resources existing within the country. To fail to achieve *charip*, and to rely on the products of other nations is to compromise the political independence of the nation.⁶ The third defining principle of Juch'e is *chawi*, the principle of military self-defense. It means to defend the nation and the people from imperialist aggression and to protect the achievements of the country from aggressors. *Chawi* demands that North Korea should build its own military force and not depend on other countries for military assistance.⁷ It is *chawi* that serves as the justification for North Korea's enormous military, and drives them to defend their nation and ideology so dearly from outside aggression. All of these principles work in concert to insulate and protect the North Korean regime from any outside threats to its legitimacy and authority.

Today, the Juch'e ideology is firmly established as the political foundation of North Korea. It has been incorporated into the North Korean Constitution, in Article 3, as the guiding principle for all actions of the Korean Workers' Party. It also states in the charter of the Korean Workers' Party that "the Workers' Party is guided only by Kim Il-Sung's Juch'e Ideology and revolutionary thoughts."⁸ As Kim Il Sung reported in 1980,

⁵ Ibid. 303.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ "Juche Ideology". Koreascope. March 2000. <http://koreascope.org/english/sub/2/nk1_4.htm>

“the whole party is rallied rock-firm around its Central Committee and knit together in ideology and purpose on the basis of the Juch’e idea. The Party has no room for any other idea than the Juch’e idea, and no force can ever break its unity and cohesion based on this idea.”⁹

This solid foundation of Juch’e is maintained by incorporating it into the education system as well. During the course of eleven years of compulsory education, young North Korean students are thoroughly indoctrinated with the ideology of Juch’e and taught to worship Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il. Instruction devoted to subjects such as the “History of Kim Il-Sung’s Revolutionary Struggles,” “The Workers’ Party Policies” and “Kim Jong-il’s Revolutionary Activities” constitutes nearly 44% of elementary school hours, and one-third of the high school curriculum.¹⁰

This brief explanation of the Juch’e ideology of Kim Il Sung has only been able to scratch the surface in detailing the power that this idea of self-reliance has over the people and institutions of North Korea. It has illustrated the basic tenets of Juch’e ideology, its origin, and the depth to which it pervades the military, economy, and educational systems of the North. It is through the Juch’e ideology and its sub-principles of political independence, a self-sustaining economy, and a strong independent military that the North Korean leadership is able to consolidate its power and ensure the survival of the regime. This information alone brings an understanding of North Korea and its future one step closer, and makes it possible to understand the motivations behind the actions of North Korean leaders.

⁹ “Political Ideology: The Role of Chuch’e”. North Korea—A Country Study. 1993. Library of Congress Country Study Series. March 2000. <[http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+kp0108\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+kp0108))>.

¹⁰ “Contents & Features in Education”. Koreascope. March 2000. <<http://koreascope.org/english/sub/2/index6.htm>>.

C. The North Korean Military

In keeping with the imperative of the Juch'e ideology to build and maintain a powerful military to defend the nation, North Korea has built up the world's fifth largest military force.¹¹ In its adopting of a policy whereby the military generally receives first priority for any national resources, North Korea has become the world's most militarized nation, and the Korean Peoples' Army has become the main source of power in North Korean society.¹² The purpose of building such a large military is not only to defend the nation, but also to create a force that is capable of attacking and defeating South Korea, and unifying the peninsula by force. North Korea's current leader, Kim Jong Il, has been able to maintain his power and control over the nation through the consolidation of his power base and support in the military.

The North Korean military consists of ground, air, naval, and special operations forces; and has been augmented in recent years with possible nuclear weapons capability and medium-range ballistic missile capabilities. The North Korean Peoples' Army is believed to number in excess of one million soldiers. The army provides the bulk of the North's offensive war-fighting capability and is the world's third largest army.¹³ The active duty ground forces are augmented by a reserve force of more than five million soldiers (out of a population of 22 million). With these forces, the North Korean Army fields nearly 5,000 tanks, 2,000 armored personnel carriers, 13,000 artillery pieces, and 2,400 multiple rocket launchers. Seventy percent of these ground forces are located

¹¹ Thomas Schwartz, "Korea Forces Commander Mar. 7 on Korean Peninsula Security". Department of State Washington File. March 9, 2000. United States Department of State. March 12, 2000. <<http://www.usinfo.state.gov/admin/008/epf309.htm>>.

¹² "Congressional Report on North Korean Threat". Department of State Washington File. November 3, 1999. United States Department of State. <<http://203.147.232.104/hyper/WF991103/epf304.htm>>, 18.

¹³ Schwartz, Korea Forces Commander.

within 100 miles of the demilitarized zone, making this area the most heavily militarized place on earth.¹⁴ The Korean People's Army is supported by an Air Force of nearly 2000 aircraft, to include 850 fighters, and a Navy of 990 ships, which includes 430 combat ships and 90 submarines.¹⁵ The North has placed a high emphasis on the survivability of its forces, placing many aircraft hangars, repair facilities, ammunition, fuel, and even air defense missile sites underground or in highly hardened shelters. North Korea also possesses the largest special operations forces in the world, numbering more than 100,000. These forces are trained to conduct operations in the enemy's rear area, conduct reconnaissance, infantry operations, and protect North Korea's rear areas.¹⁶

In order to maintain a military force of such magnitude, North Korea has poured nearly 25% of its GNP into the military year after year, the highest such figure in the world.¹⁷ This funding ensures that the military continues to grow in both conventional forces and asymmetrical forces (special operations forces, ballistic missiles, and weapons of mass destruction). Much of this funding in recent years has gone into the development and testing of ballistic missiles. The North Korean ballistic missile inventory includes more than 500 SCUD missiles. Missiles such as the No-dong 1 are capable of striking US military bases in Japan, and the North tested the 2,000-kilometer range Taepo-dong 1 in August of 1998.¹⁸ Additionally, North Korea has frozen its program to develop weapons of mass destruction (WMD) under the provisions of the 1994 Agreed

¹⁴ Congressional Report on North Korean Threat. 18.

¹⁵ "Military Power". Koreascope. March 2000. <<http://koreascope.org/english/sub/2/index5.htm>>

¹⁶ Congressional Report on North Korean Threat. 19.

¹⁷ Michael O'Hanlon, "Stopping a North Korean Invasion: Why defending South Korea is easier than the Pentagon thinks", International Security, v22n4 (1998) 138-139.

¹⁸ Sung-yul Lee, "North Korea conducts detonator tests for nuclear weapons; May be planning another firing of Taepodong Missile", The Korea Herald, November 24, 1998.

Framework, which provides the North with light-water reactors and heavy heating oil for halting any further development of its nuclear program.¹⁹ It is believed that the North is adhering to this agreement, but many US politicians and members of the international community continue to harbor doubts. Regardless, the mere perception that such weapons of mass destruction exist is as effective a deterrent and bargaining tool for the North Koreans as having the weapons themselves.

An additional aspect of the military in North Korea is its impact on North Korean society. The involvement of nearly one-third of North Korea's citizens in a direct way with the military has served to closely intertwine the daily lives of both the military and the people of North Korea. Anecdotal evidence leads one to believe that there are few areas of North Korea where a military presence cannot be observed. The militaristic nature of schooling and the strictly controlled way of life in the North serve to even further ingrain a military mentality into the minds of North Koreans. To North Korea, the Army is much more than just a military organization that operates apart from the rest of society; it is "North Korea's largest employer, purchaser, and consumer, the central unifying structure in the country, and the source of power for the regime."²⁰ It is in this all pervasive way that the military in North Korea provides not only deterrence, defense, a massive offensive threat, and leverage in international negotiations²¹, but also a way of life for its people and the regime.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Schwartz, Korea Forces Commander.

²¹ Ibid.

D. The North Korean Economic System

As with most other aspects of North Korean society, the North Korean economy has been established on the founding principles of the Juch'e ideology. The North Korean economy employs a Stalinist economic strategy that emphasizes maximum self-sufficiency, extensive state ownership and control, and a very high level of autocracy and aloofness from the international system.²² Economic planning is highly centralized, and all prices, wages, budgets, and banking are under strict governmental control. Such a closed, controlled economy has been yet another way of assuring political independence for the North Korean people. Since the 1960's, North Korea has been following an inward looking economic strategy focused primarily on the development of a heavy industrial base. The agricultural system was collectivized back in the 1950's, and since that time has operated under strict state control, with little incentive for production other than the grace of Kim Il Sung. The North Korean economy is one that is highly skewed toward the industrial sector, and that has allowed its agricultural and light industrial sectors to remain stagnant.

After the Korean War, North Korea's economic conditions were initially far more favorable than the South's in terms of mining, manufacturing and industry. The North possessed more abundant and diverse mineral resources, as well as an industrial infrastructure left over from Japanese colonialism.²³ North Korea continued to build upon this already solid economic foundation, strengthening its manufacturing sector not

²² Robert Scalapino, "Two Koreas Face the Future", Hoseo University Research Center for Unification, 14 Feb. 1995, speech transcript, October 1999.

<<http://www.hoseo.ac.kr/~css/institutes/archive/scalapino.html>>

²³ Il-Dong Koh, "Complementarity of Industrial Structures Between North and South Korea", Korean Options in a Changing International Order, ed. by Hong Yung Lee and Chung Chongwook, (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1993) 140-141.

only to develop the economy, but to create an independent base for national defense.²⁴ In support of this strategy of heavy industrialization, North Korea poured between 40 to 60% of its GNP into the mining and manufacturing sectors of its economy from the 1960s until the 1990s. The results of these efforts were initially very favorable, as the North was able to surpass the GNP of the South yearly from the late 1940s to the early 1970s.²⁵

As a result of the concentration on heavy industry, however, serious structural imbalances have been created in the economy. Most notable is a scarcity of daily necessities for most North Koreans. A lack of imports, as dictated by the desire for economic independence from other nations, and the limited production of light industry has resulted in shortages of basic consumer goods and those items necessary to maintain a reasonable standard of living for North Koreans.

In order to achieve such a level of initial industrial development, the North Korean state has tightly controlled all economic assets in the country, maintaining property rights and granting only usage rights on cooperative farms. The economic planning is performed by the State Planning Commission, which determines all production quotas and prices. One somewhat contradictory factor that has assisted North Korea in building up its economy in the decades after the Korean War has been the assistance of the Soviet Union. In keeping with the Juch'e ideology, Pyongyang likes to appear self sufficient in its own economy and resources, but in fact "Soviet largess was critical to North Korea; it supplied nearly 70% of North Korea's oil needs at friendship

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Nicholas Eberstadt, "North Korea: Reform, Muddling Through, or Collapse?", One Korea? Challenges and Prospects for Reunification, ed. Thomas H. Henriksen, Kyongsoo Lho, (Stanford: Hoover Press, 1994) 17.

discount prices and on barter. Many of North Korea's industrial facilities were built or rehabilitated with Soviet assistance."²⁶

Despite the initial success of the North Korean economy, some potential problems had taken shape during the 1980s, setting the stage for an era of economic hardship in the decade to come. The North had come to rely heavily on the Soviet Union for both imports and exports, as well as such basic needs as oil. The collapse of this valuable trading partner would leave an enormous void in the North Korean economy and its ability to sustain itself. The concentration on heavy industry alone for the past several decades had also left North Korea in a position where some of the daily needs of its people could not be met. Isolation and self-reliance has also kept North Korea from receiving the benefits of foreign technology exchange and the influx of foreign currency. The highly controlled, rigid nature of the North Korea economy would make it difficult to react to changes in the external situation and effectively implement changes to the system. The diligence, determination, and loyalty of the North Korean people to Juch'e and the regime would be no match for these mounting difficulties and the looming economic woes that awaited them at the beginning of the 1990s.

E. The Rise of Kim Jong Il

As the current leader of North Korea, and one that appears to be firmly in control, Kim Jong Il holds the keys to the future of North Korea. The first-born son of North Korean leader Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il has been groomed to take over the reigns of North Korean leadership since the early 1970s. Although the true record of Kim Jong Il

²⁶ Rinn-Sup Shinn, "North Korea: Policy Determinants, Alternative Outcomes, U.S. Policy Approaches", Report 93-612, Congressional Research Service, 24 June (1993) 3.

is difficult to determine because so many accomplishments have been attributed to him since he was designated as the successor to Kim Il Sung, he is believed to have been born in 1942 in the Soviet Far East.²⁷ He studied abroad in East Germany and Romania during his high school years, but returned to North Korea to attend Kim Il Sung University in 1960. In college Kim studied political economics, and upon graduation from college he was assigned to work in the Department of Organization and Guidance of the Central Committee of the party.²⁸ Since that time, Kim Jong Il has slowly made his ascent to power in North Korea, ultimately becoming the most powerful man in the nation. In addition to working in the government, Kim Jong Il is believed to have devoted much of his time to filmmaking and the production of plays. He is married, and the father of two children, at least one of which is a son. Outside of this information, and that which appears in official North Korean press, little else of Kim Jong Il's personality or personal life is known. His voice is almost never broadcast; he is rarely photographed, and has made only a few visits to other communist countries, all highly secretive.²⁹

In order to perpetuate the regime and ideology that he had founded, Kim Il Sung chose to name his son his successor, in a process that began in the 1970s. Any serious rivals to power had been eliminated by that time, and most of Kim Il Sung's partisans were few in number and too old.³⁰ Operation of the Korean Workers' Party was slowly shifted to the hands of Kim Jong Il, under the careful supervision of his father. As Kim Jong Il gained acceptance among party officials and the people in his position as

²⁷ Suh, p. 282.

²⁸ Ibid. 284.

²⁹ "Profile: Despite illustrious descent, Kim Jong Il shrouded in mystery", Nando Times News, September 5, 1998. <http://www.business-server.com/newsroom/ntn/world/090598/world27_13946_S1_body.html>.

³⁰ Suh. 276.

successor, he began to be referred to as the *party center*, a sign that his authority and position were being recognized. Another sign that Kim Jong Il was being accepted as the future leader of North Korea is the promotional campaign that emerged for Kim Chong-Suk, Kim Il Sung's first wife, and mother of Kim Jong Il.³¹ Previously, she had been paid little attention, but now that she was the mother of North Korea's future leader, she was elevated to the role of a great revolutionary and a pioneer of the Korean women's movement. By the time of the Sixth Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea in 1980, it was clear that all opposition to Kim Il Sung declaring his son heir had been cleared away. Kim Jong Il was named secretary of the party's Secretariat, and was also elected to the fourth highest position in the Politburo, the Presidium of the Politburo. He was also the third highest-ranking member of the Military Commission of the Party. During the time of Kim Il Sung's rule, no other political leader had ever risen so quickly to such a high position in the party.³²

Kim Jong Il's rise to control of Korean Workers' Party operations in 1980 was the first step in his succession to power. Some have said that Kim Jong Il lacks the leadership and charisma of his father, in addition to lacking the military connections that his father used to consolidate his regime. No one was more aware of this weakness than Kim Il Sung, who, in 1991 at the age of 80 began to transfer even more power to his son by having him named to posts that gave him influence over the military. In 1991, Kim Jong Il was named supreme commander of the Korean Peoples' Army, giving him a position from which he could enhance his authority through the day-to-day leadership

³¹ Ibid. 279.

³² Ibid. 281.

and promotion of officers to senior ranks.³³ This important move was Kim Il Sung's last act to solidify support for his son's succession before his death in 1994.

After the death of Kim Il Sung in 1994, North Korea and Kim Jong Il faced a period of uncertainty. Many North Korea scholars and analysts speculated as to the ability of Kim Jong Il to carry on the legacy of his father and maintain a firm grip on the reigns of power in North Korea. Kim Jong Il was originally scheduled to assume the post of general secretary of the Korean Workers' Party in October 1995, but this important event was postponed for two years due to the rising economic and internal problems in North Korea, adding fuel to the fire that Kim's power was in question. However, the delay was Kim's own decision, and he used that time to even further consolidate his position within the military. Prior to a lavish celebration of the sixty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Korean People's Army in 1997, Kim Jong Il promoted 123 generals, leaving the country with a total of 1220 generals, a staggering number.³⁴ Shortly after this, Kim was finally confirmed as the general secretary of the Korean Workers' Party, and less than a year later he was elevated to the highest post of the state, that of chairman of the National Defense Commission. Kim had actually held the latter post since 1993, but a constitutional amendment made this position the highest in the land.³⁵ Since this ascension, the great majority of Kim Jong Il's public appearances have been in conjunction with military activities or at military installations, and he is always

³³ Komaki Teruo, "What to Expect from Kim Jong Il's North Korea", Japan Echo, v 25 n1, (1998) 1.

³⁴ Amos A. Jordan and Jae H. Ku, "Coping with North Korea", The Washington Quarterly, v21n1(1998) 36.

³⁵ "North Korea confirms Kim Jong Il as official head of state", Nando Times News, September 5, 1998. <http://www.business-server.com/newsroom/ntn/world/090598/world27_13946_body.html>.

accompanied by high-ranking military officials when in public, demonstrating the link between his power and the military.³⁶

Critics aside, Kim Jong Il has been able to ascend to the highest positions in the army and the party with little interference. Any opposition that has arisen has been quickly and brutally defeated. His succession to the post of chairman of the National Defense Commission reaffirms the importance of the military to Kim's power, and reflects the level to which he has consolidated his power base in the military. The younger Kim has been able to successfully capitalize on his father's legacy, and build upon it. He continues to promote loyal officers and party officials around him, and welcome a new generation of leaders into positions of power. Kim Jong Il is clearly focused on maintaining his authority and preserving the regime that he has inherited from his father. It seems quite certain at this point that the future of North Korea will be determined by the actions of Kim Jong Il. However, Kim may face his greatest challenge yet in the years to come. If he is able to walk the delicate tight rope of repairing the nation's deteriorating economy, and eliminating the years-long famine, while still preserving the legitimacy of the Juch'e ideology and the loyalty of the military, his regime will surely survive well into the 21st century.

³⁶ Robert Scalapino, "North Korea at a Crossroads", Essays in Public Policy, No. 73 (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution, 1997) 7.

III. THE DECLINE OF NORTH KOREA

A. Introduction

Despite the successful rise to power of Kim Jong Il, and North Korea's continued obsession with bolstering its military power, the rest of the country has not fared so well in recent years. The international isolation that the North once sought to maintain has gone awry. The Soviet Union has collapsed, and China has pulled back from its original policy toward North Korea. North Korea has deprived itself of the benefits that other nations enjoy from foreign technology and foreign investment. Natural disasters have combined with existent weaknesses in the North Korean agricultural system to create a famine that has now lasted since 1995, taken the lives of hundreds of thousands of North Koreans, and prompted the North to request hundreds of thousands of tons in food aid. Increasing numbers of defectors in recent years have made their way into neighboring countries from the North, and are yet another sign of the deteriorating conditions within North Korea. Underlying all of this hardship is the economy itself, which has recorded negative growth for nine straight years and shows little sign of recovering without substantial assistance from other nations. This chapter examines in detail these factors contributing to North Korea's current situation, to build upon the background set forth previously, and explain the rationale behind the recent flurry of experts heralding the impending collapse of North Korea.

B. International Isolation

For nearly the past five decades, North Korea has isolated itself from the international community in pursuit of political and economic independence under the Juch'e ideology. The only exceptions to this policy of isolation have been the former Soviet Union and China. The Soviet system was adopted wholesale by the North Koreans during the period from 1945 to 1950³⁷; and after the Korean War, North Korea relied heavily on the Soviet Union for economic support to rebuild its destroyed infrastructure.³⁸ North Korea also benefited from the sale of Soviet weapons, equipment, oil, and other supplies throughout this period. Similarly, Chinese foreign policy toward Korea after the Korean War was focused solely on North Korea. China refused to acknowledge South Korea, and lavished the North with military and economic assistance to further strengthen their relationship. China signed a mutual defense treaty with North Korea in 1961, making them the guarantor of North Korea's security in the event of another military conflict on the peninsula.

However, since the beginning of the 1990s, increased diplomatic efforts on the part of South Korea have resulted in a drastic increase in the isolation of the North. In 1990 the Soviet Union and South Korea normalized diplomatic relations, and a year later the Soviet Bloc and Cold War structure in Northeast Asia crumbled. These events demoralized the North both politically and economically. The North lost a major trading partner and provider of crucial repair parts and resources to maintain its industrial infrastructure. It also has harbored much resentment against Moscow for betraying their decades-long relationship in favor of establishing contact with South Korea. Moscow-

³⁷ Donald S. McDonald, The Koreans: Contemporary Politics and Society, (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1996) 166.

³⁸ Suh. 140, 149.

Pyongyang relations hit a low in 1994 when Russian President Boris Yeltsin did not even send condolences to North Korea after the death of Kim Il Sung.³⁹ Since that time Russia has restored some basic relations with North Korea, although their refusal to renew their mutual assistance treaty with Pyongyang in 1996, and again in 2000, reflects that relations between the two countries will never return to their past levels.⁴⁰ Russia has been too involved with restoring its own position in the international arena to reengage the troubled North Korean regime.

China's changing policy toward the two Koreas has also been a cause of deepening isolation for North Korea in the 1990s. China normalized relations with South Korea in 1992 in a move that benefited them both politically and economically. It has moved China closer to playing a major leadership role in Asia, and allowed them to benefit from increased trade with the economically strong South Korea. Since the normalization of relations, the volume of trade between the two nations increased to a phenomenal \$20 billion in 1996, nearly 40 times that of Sino-North Korean trade.⁴¹ As with the Russian-North Korean case, China's adoption of a 'two-Korea' policy alienated the North Koreans and caused them to feel betrayed by their long-standing ally. Although China has distanced itself from North Korea considerably, it continues to give the North food aid in an effort to preserve the stability of this neighboring nation. However, it is clear that, as with Russia, North Korea and China will never regain the level of their past relations.

³⁹ Seung-Ho Joo, "Russia and Korea", The Korean Peninsula and the Major Powers, ed. Bae-Ho Hahn, Chae-Jin Lee (Seoul: Sejong Institute, 1998) 81.

⁴⁰ Seung-Ho Joo, "Russian Policy on Korean Unification in the Post-Cold War Era", Pacific Affairs v69n1 (1996) 35.

⁴¹ Chae-Jin Lee, "The Evolution of China's Two-Korea Policy," The Korean Peninsula and the Major Powers, ed. Bae-Ho Hahn, Chae-Jin Lee (Seoul: Sejong Institute, 1998) 115-116.

C. A Failing Economy

The end of the era of economic assistance from the Soviet Union and China dealt a major blow to the North Korean economy- one from which it has not been able to recover.⁴² The North's Stalinist-type command economy has been steadily declining for the last decade due to the cumulative effects of the inherent defects in a planned economy, as well as economic mismanagement and corruption. The high degree of autarky of the North Korean economic system has served to separate it from the technological revolution that has been taking place around it, and prevented it from acquiring the benefits of foreign exchange.⁴³ The skewed nature of the economy toward the military and heavy industry has severely affected consumer production and the development of light industry. At present, the limited economic reforms that have been made as a belated response to the economic crisis appear to be having little impact.

Although the absence of detailed statistics makes it difficult to get an accurate picture of the North Korean economy, it is possible to put together a reasonable statistical picture of the dismal situation inside North Korea. The North Korean economy has recorded negative economic growth for the nine years from 1990 to 1998. The GNP of the North has shrunk by nearly 50% between 1992 and 1996.⁴⁴ North Korea still maintains more than \$11 billion in external debt, which is more than 50% of its annual GNP, and has been unpaid since 1980. This has been a matter of North Korean policy, which insists that "exploiting" capitalist economies forgive the debts of developing

⁴² Scalapino, "North Korea at a Crossroads", 2.

⁴³ Ibid. 3.

⁴⁴ Reese. 16.

nations.⁴⁵ Many sources have reported an energy shortage that plagues the nation. According to North Korea expert Robert Scalapino, it has been “estimated that most factories are running at no more than one-third capacity”, and the failure to replace obsolete or inoperative machinery only furthers difficulties. Such basic services as electricity and water do not function reliably, even in the capital, Pyongyang.⁴⁶ The chronic energy shortage and sub-zero winter temperatures makes staying warm in unheated factories, homes and schools a daily struggle for most North Koreans.⁴⁷ Lastly, estimates of foreign trade statistics suggest that North Korea’s foreign trade has declined substantially during the 1990’s, with the loss of its two largest trade partners. It is estimated that foreign trade only accounts for 9-12 percent of the Democratic Peoples’ Republic of Korea (DPRK) GDP, in contrast to nearly 58 percent in South Korea.⁴⁸

North Korea has made efforts of varying degrees to arrest the decline of its economy in the past decade, both illicit and genuine. Most disturbing to the United States and South Korea is North Korea’s proliferation of medium-range ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in search of revenues to boost its sagging economy.⁴⁹ Missile sales to such nations as Iran, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and Pakistan have been an important means of earning much needed foreign currency. Test firings of No Dong medium range missiles by both Iran and Pakistan in 1998 are evidence of such

⁴⁵ Kongdan Oh and Ralph Hassig, “North Korea between collapse and reform”, Asian Survey, v39n2 (1999) 292.

⁴⁶ David G. Brown, “North Korea in 1998: A year of foreboding developments”, Asian Survey, v39n1 (1999) 127.

⁴⁷ Rebecca MacKinnon, “Food, fuel and medicine shortages plague North Korea”, Asia Now, CNN, December 14, 1999. <<http://www.cnn.com/1999/ASIANOW/east/12/14/nkorea.crisis/>>.

⁴⁸ Scalapino, 3.

⁴⁹ Marcus Noland, “Turmoil on the Korean Peninsula,” Institute for International Economics website, Feb. 2000, <<http://207.238.152.36/TESTMONY/harvard.htm>>. 3

facts.⁵⁰ Less is known about North Korean proliferation of WMD or its associated technology, but it is likely to have occurred as well. North Korea is also known to be heavily involved in the illicit practices of drug trafficking and counterfeiting. As much as \$70 million a year is estimated to be generated from illegal drug sales. The primary drugs sold are amphetamines, which are produced in North Korea and distributed by organized crime gangs in Taiwan and Japan.⁵¹ At least 27 documented incidents in the 1990s, many involving North Korean diplomats, directly link the North Korean government to drug trafficking and production.⁵² North Korean counterfeiting operations primarily involve US \$100 bills, even the new US currency designed to be copy-proof. North Korean officials have been arrested with counterfeit US currency in Russia, Macao, and Cambodia; and the counterfeit currency has turned up in six other countries as well. It is estimated that North Korea has generated nearly \$15 million from counterfeiting in 1997.⁵³

Less publicized, but perhaps more important to the future of North Korea's economy are some genuine efforts at reform. In 1991 North Korea established the Rajin-Sonbong free-trade zone in the northeast area of the country near the border with China and Russia. The purpose of establishing the zone was three-fold: to be a major container port for northeast Asia, to be a site for export-oriented industry, and to be a tourist location.⁵⁴ However, due to a lack of legal guarantees, internal instability, and Pyongyang's inexperience with such endeavors, little foreign investment has been

⁵⁰ Congressional Report on North Korean Threat. 21.

⁵¹ Mike Chinoy, "Will China end North Korea's illegal activities in Macau?" *Asia Now*, CNN, December 18, 1999. <<http://www.cnn.com/1999/ASIANOW/east/macau/stories/macau.north.Korea/index.html>. 3.

⁵² Congressional Report on North Korean Threat. 26-29.

⁵³ Ibid. 25.

⁵⁴ Reese. 36.

attracted to the zone. As recently as 1998, a Constitutional revision refers to such concepts as “private property”, material incentives”, and “cost, price, and profit”.⁵⁵ It is unclear whether these changes are part of a larger reform effort at this time. A related change is the strengthening and development of the management of farming cooperative teams to raise farmers’ incentive to produce. Teams have been reduced in size from 15-25 people to 7-8 people to enhance the spirit of collectivism within the group. If the team exceeds its production quota, it may dispose of the surplus however it wishes.⁵⁶ This change is significant in that it goes together with the decision by local authorities to permit private markets where the teams can sell or barter their surplus.⁵⁷ Viewed as a whole, the North Korean economy is incapable of reforming itself completely from within. However, future external incentives may be able to induce North Korea to give up its illicit activities, expand its already apparent efforts at reform, and emerge from the decline of the 1990s.

D. Famine

Closely intertwined with the decay of the North Korean economy is the years-long famine that has plagued the nation. Being a mostly mountainous country with only 18 percent of its land arable, North Korea has faced food scarcity since its inception.⁵⁸ As early as 1988, North Korea’s inefficient collective farming methods and basic cultivation techniques led the country to seek outside food subsidies from China and

⁵⁵ Marcus Noland, Sherman Robinson, and Tao Wang, “Rigorous Speculation: The Collapse and Revival of the North Korean Economy”, Institute for International Economics, Working Paper 99-1, February 1999. <<http://www.iie.com/CATALOG/WP/1999/99-1.htm>>. 3.

⁵⁶ Komaki Teruo. 7.

⁵⁷ Selig S. Harrison, “Promoting a Soft Landing in Korea”, Foreign Policy, n106 (1997) 63.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 62.

enact social campaigns to reduce food consumption to only two meals a day.⁵⁹ Food problems worsened in 1995, when torrential rains caused heavy flooding and severe crop damage. In 1996 flooding again plagued the country, and in 1997 drought caused major damage to the summer corn crop.⁶⁰ These devastating environmental conditions, in concert with North Korea's already poor agricultural techniques, have resulted in severe grain shortfalls amounting to millions of tons each year.

The famine in North Korea and the successive grain shortfalls that it has caused means that this once self-reliant nation has had to increasingly rely on the outside world for food aid. Since the floods began in 1995, the failing communist nation has received hundreds of thousands of tons in food aid from the likes of China, South Korea, Japan, the United States, and international organizations such as the World Food Program.⁶¹ China has been North Korea's main source of help, providing more than \$200 million worth of food annually since the crisis began. The US has been giving increasingly more to the ailing nation. It provided 120,000 tons through the World Food Program in 1997, and promised another 500,000 tons in 1998.⁶² Both nations view the providing of food aid to North Korea not only as a humanitarian gesture, but as small assurance that this possible nuclear power and rogue state will remain stable. Despite the best efforts of the international community, the famine in North Korea has been difficult to overcome. In July 1999, the World Food Program launched its fifth consecutive emergency operation in the DPRK, which involved 500,000 tons of grain and targeted more than 8 million

⁵⁹ Reese. 29.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid. 28-31.

⁶² Ibid.

starving North Koreans.⁶³ The grain shortfall for the current year is 623,000 tons, indicating that assistance programs will have to remain in North Korea for the foreseeable future.

The consequences of famine in North Korea have been devastating. The food aid has certainly helped rescue many North Koreans from starvation, but for many it has been too late. Estimates of the number of premature deaths due to malnutrition range from 300,000 to 800,000 annually since 1995, and totaled more than 1-3 million by the end of 1998. A survey of the situation inside North Korea in 1998 revealed that 62% of children under the age of seven had stunted growth due to malnutrition.⁶⁴ The young and elderly have been the most vulnerable to the ravages of famine, and the health of the North Korean populace in general has declined in the past five years. The nation's medical system has ceased to function and hospitals lack both heat and medicine. Malnutrition and poor health have become part of a vicious cycle that now plagues North Korea. The North's coveted military has also shown signs of deterioration as a result of the internal situation. The readiness and training levels of North Korea's conventional forces have steadily declined due to extensive shortages of food and fuel.⁶⁵ Overall, the famine has caused tremendous human suffering within North Korea, and ensured that the country will remain dependent on outside humanitarian aid for some time to come.

⁶³ Press Release, "New \$260 Million WFP Operation to Help Feed 8 Million in North Korea", World Food Programme April 23, 1999. <<http://www.wfp.org/prelease/1999/990423.htm>>. 2.

⁶⁴ Oh and Hassig. 287.

⁶⁵ Richard J. Newman, "Girding for Implosion," U.S. News and World Report, Oct. 27, 1997. <<http://www.usnews.com/usnews/issue/971927/27kore.htm>>. 3.

E. Defectors

The last significant indicator of the decline of North Korea is the recent increase in defectors and refugees fleeing to neighboring countries. This increase has largely been a by-product of the conditions already mentioned—famine, crumbling infrastructure, and an economy that cannot support its people. As North Koreans have found it more and more difficult to survive inside their own country, they have chosen to flee their famine-stricken nation in search of food and better living conditions in China, and some have even reached South Korea. As of this writing, nearly 800 North Koreans have sought political asylum in South Korea, and the numbers have remained steady since 1996.⁶⁶ The number of refugees that have made their way across North Korea's border with China is far greater. It is estimated that the number of North Korean defectors in China is between 10,000 and 30,000. Some South Korean civic groups estimate the number to be as high as 300,000; Chinese authorities believe the figure to be closer to 10,000.⁶⁷

Even more significant than the defections of normal North Korean citizens has been the occurrence of the defections of several high-level North Korean government officials. Perhaps the clearest sign that North Korean leadership has been divided in recent years and is in disarray is the defection of Hwang Jang Yop, a secretary of the North Korean Workers' Party, in Beijing in 1997. Hwang was a chief architect of Juch'e ideology, and reportedly a leader of the moderate-reformist faction in North Korea.⁶⁸ It is believed that Hwang had become dissatisfied with the current situation in North Korea.

⁶⁶ "Defectors". Koreascope. March 2000. <<http://koreascope.org/english/sub/2/index4.htm>>

⁶⁷ Yong-bae Shin, "North Korean defectors in China number 10,000-30,000, Hong says", The Korea Herald Online, October 7, 1999. <http://www.koreaherald.co.kr/cgi-bin/searched_word.asp?qstr=defectors&.../19991007_0209.htm>.

⁶⁸ Seung-Ho Joo, "Korean Foreign Relations Toward the Twenty-First Century: Reunification and Beyond", American Asian Review, v16n3 (1998): 102.

In August of the same year, Chang Song gil, North Korea's ambassador to Egypt, and his brother, Chang Sung ho, a senior trade representative at the North Korean mission in Paris, both defected to the United States. The ambassador is the highest-ranking diplomat ever to have defected from the DPRK, and is thought to have knowledge of North Korean arms sales to countries in the Middle East.⁶⁹ A third significant defection was the defection of a North Korean Air Force officer by flying his MiG-19 jet across the DMZ in 1996.⁷⁰ These three defections are significant because they represent evidence of growing dissatisfaction in North Korea, not just by the common people, but by the privileged members of the ruling class and the military. Together with the fleeing of thousands of refugees into China and South Korea, these defections are a clear reflection of the current instability and uncertainty within North Korea.

F. Conclusion

The current situation in North Korea is truly a grim one. Years of international isolation have been compounded by a failing economy; and the effects of a weak agricultural system have been exacerbated by floods, inefficiency, and mismanagement. Despite the efforts of countries like China, South Korea, Japan, and the United States, and the provision of hundreds of thousands of tons of international food aid and humanitarian assistance, North Korea appears to be in an irreversible downward spiral that only recently has shown modest, unconfirmed signs of being halted. It is no wonder that North Korea watchers have long speculated that the future of this backward nation

⁶⁹ Norman Kempster, "U.S. Accepts 2 Defecting N. Korean Diplomats," Los Angeles Times, August 27, 1997, Home Ed., A4.

⁷⁰ Ji-Ae Sohn, "North Korean pilot defects to South Korea," CNN World News, CNN, May 23, 1996. <<http://www.207.25.71.28/WORLD/9605/23/korea.defector/index.html>>.

will most certainly be collapse. However, as discussed, there are small seeds of reform in the collective farming system and in the formation of people's markets, which cannot be ignored. Also overlooked is one by-product of the international aid flowing into North Korea that may ultimately prove to be the key to North Korea's future—the yet unrealized power of western contact. Aid organizations and their workers have slowly made their presence felt in all areas of this isolated nation. Their influence may serve as a catalyst to the small reform efforts already present in the North, and may someday be able to crack the harsh ideological façade of North Korea and reverse its years of misfortune.

IV. THE FUTURE OF NORTH KOREA

A. Introduction

With a faltering economy that shows only small indications of reform or improvement from within, a famine that only can be abated with the continued help of international food aid, and a decaying national infrastructure, it is no surprise that speculation on the impending collapse of North Korea has reached its zenith in recent years. Those with a more hopeful outlook and an eye for the seeds of reform in North Korea have speculated on a slow gradual reform of North Korea. Out of this speculation has grown a body of scholarly articles describing the various possible scenarios for the future of North Korea. The theories that exist differ in their descriptions, pre-conditions, key indicators, and other such characteristics. However, upon detailed examination, it is possible to group these possibilities into two distinct categories: the ‘hard landing’ scenario and the ‘soft landing’ scenario. In the following pages, these two competing theories will be discussed, in addition to two other possibilities that are less likely to occur, but must still be addressed, given the unstable nature of the North Korean situation.

B. Hard Landing

The most widely proposed scenario for the future of North Korea has commonly been referred to as the ‘hard landing’. The ‘hard landing’ generally is described as “the inability of the regime in power to maintain effective political, economic, social, and military control, which ultimately leads to its dissolution and, in the extreme case, the

formal end of the state.”⁷¹ Although many variations of the ‘hard landing’ have been hypothesized, for the sake of this discussion, a ‘hard landing’ is an internal collapse or implosion of North Korean society that could be caused by one of three possibilities. If Kim Jong Il chooses to slowly open the country to modest and calculated reforms, hard-line or military leaders may perceive their existence to be threatened and be dissatisfied with the newly adopted engagement policy of the regime. In response, they might lead a coup against Kim Jong Il and his reformist supporters that results in internal chaos, power struggle, and ultimately collapse. On the other hand, Kim Jong Il’s attempt at reform may threaten internal political stability to such an extent that a group of ‘enlightened reformers’ composed of governmental and military elites would attempt to seize power and launch their own modernization and reform campaign.⁷² The third proposed cause of a ‘hard landing’ is less probable, but still possible. It involves the common people, no longer able to stand the harsh conditions they are forced to endure, rising up against Kim Jong Il and his regime. This too would result in internal chaos, instability, and an undercutting of Kim Jong Il’s regime as the government tries to maintain control. The latter possibility will become more likely if North Korea opens its borders to further outside influences,⁷³ and the people discover the true dismal nature of their situation.

Regardless of the cause of a ‘hard landing’, the scenario that emerges would be characterized by political instability so rampant that any successor regime would be unable to retain effective control, so that there would be no effective, central governing

⁷¹ Jonathan D. Pollack and Chung Min Lee, Preparing for Korean Unification: Scenarios and Implications (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Institute, 1999) 40-41.

⁷² Robert A. Manning, “The United States and the endgame in Korea: assessment, scenarios, and implications,” Asian Survey, v37n7 (1997) 603-604.

⁷³ Amos A. Jordan and Jae H. Ku. 35.

authority led either by the party, the bureaucracy, the military, or the people.⁷⁴ The occurrence of a 'hard landing' in North Korea would be difficult to predict in such a closed nation. However, some indicators would be visible to the outside world, and might include such things as further increases in defections to South Korea, China, and Russia of high-ranking North Korean officials and military officers; oblique criticism of Kim Jong Il's rule and legitimacy in the official media; a major surge in refugee flows into neighboring countries; growing militarization of the party by allotting key party posts to senior military officers; and a refusal to participate in any normalization talks or counter proliferation negotiations.⁷⁵ Although the occurrence of only one of these indicators does not signal the impending collapse of North Korea, if several of these indicators became visible within a short period of time, it would certainly indicate an increased likelihood for collapse.

Predicting if or when a future North Korean collapse might occur is a highly uncertain task. However, one thing is for certain-- that a 'hard landing' is viewed as the least favorable scenario by all of the nations eyeing North Korea's future. The collapse of North Korea would leave a vacuum in Northeast Asia, and create even more instability and uncertainty than currently exists. The enormous flow of refugees into neighboring South Korea would be extremely costly for the South, a shock for which Seoul does not currently have the economic resources.⁷⁶ Control of North Korea's nuclear technology and ballistic missiles would be put into question and threaten the security of Japan, South Korea, and the US Forces stationed in these countries. The collapse of North Korea is a

⁷⁴ Pollack and Lee. 40.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 64.

⁷⁶ Seung-Ho Joo, "Korean Foreign Relations Toward the Twenty-First Century: Reunification and Beyond". 104.

fate that is neither inevitable nor completely preventable, but it is a future that is so uncertain and undesirable that each of the major regional powers will take extreme measures to ensure it does not occur.

C. Soft Landing

The other widely offered scenario for the future of North Korea is known as the 'soft landing'. This scenario generally is described as an opening of North Korea to the outside world that occurs in a peaceful, gradual, and controlled manner. Unlike the 'hard landing' scenario, which could be precipitated by any one of several different causes, it is generally believed that a 'soft landing' in North Korea can only be brought about by engagement on the part of the international community. There are small signs that a movement toward reform is being made within North Korea, but the regime is ill prepared to arrest the current decline without outside assistance.⁷⁷ Focused on the survival of his regime, it is difficult for Kim Jong Il to institute the reforms that could potentially result in its downfall. Engagement of North Korea involving the continued, unconditional provision of food aid; increased human and cultural contacts between the North and other countries; increased diplomatic efforts; and further investment in viable economic development projects can not only reverse the economic decline in North Korea, but set it on the path toward a 'soft landing'.⁷⁸

If the United States, South Korea, and other nations endeavor to cautiously engage North Korea in an attempt to restore its failing economy and urge the adoption of reforms, they may ultimately be able to induce an eventual 'soft landing' in the North.

⁷⁷Reese. 81.

⁷⁸Selig S. Harrison. 62.

Particularly critical to the achievement of a 'soft landing' is the improvement of relations between North and South Korea. As a result, an eventual 'soft landing' must be characterized by a gradual increase in communication and confidence-building measures between North and South Korea, major threat reduction activities on the peninsula, and comprehensive reconciliation between the two Koreas in addition to engagement by other nations.⁷⁹ Some indicators of the occurrence of a future 'soft landing' in North Korea would include the cessation of political propaganda by both North Korea and South Korea; routine high-level exchanges between North Korea and other nations; the release of political prisoners; increased freedom of movement and travel within and between the two Koreas; constitutional and legislative changes that allow for unrestricted economic activity between the North and South, to include the flow of people, goods, services, capital, and technology; and movement by the United States toward normalization of relations with North Korea.⁸⁰ As with the 'hard landing', the occurrence of only one of these indicators is not enough to cause predictions of an imminent 'soft landing'. However, if several of these indicators occur and remain in place, then the likelihood of a 'soft landing' substantially increases.

The 'soft landing' is the most favorable scenario for the future of North Korea for all countries with interests in Northeast Asia. A gradual and successive reconciliation of the relationships between North Korea and South Korea, Japan, and the United States would serve to greatly reduce political and military tensions on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia. The United States favors a 'soft landing' because of the obvious reduction in tensions for its 37,000 troops stationed in South Korea, and because of the

⁷⁹ Pollack and Lee. 49.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 53.

opportunity to eliminate the WMD and ballistic missile threats through negotiation and disarmament. China prefers the stable but divided Korean Peninsula that would result from a 'soft landing' of North Korea. The buffer state between China and the US presence in South Korea would still remain in place, and China could continue to pursue its economic objectives in a more peaceful international environment.⁸¹ Japan would also welcome the increased stability and security that a peaceful, yet divided, Korean Peninsula offers.

D. Unlikely Alternatives

In addition to the 'soft landing' and 'hard landing' scenarios, many other scenarios for the future of North Korea have been put forth in recent years. The two most often cited are the 'soft landing' and 'hard landing', but other scenarios as well appear frequently in scholarly articles addressing the future of North Korea. 'Muddling through' and the 'hard landing- explosion' are two other scenarios that could still occur in North Korea's future, but I believe such occurrences to be highly unlikely.

1. Muddling Through

The concept of 'muddling through' refers to a method that can be used to formulate public policy that was first introduced by Charles Lindblom in 1959. It involves the implementation of minute changes in policy that are only incrementally different from the status quo. Such incremental politics are conducive to trial and error and the reduction of controversy when attempting to change the status quo. 'Muddling

⁸¹ Fei-Ling Wang, "China and Korean Unification," Korea and World Affairs, (Summer 1998) 191.

through' can be seen as an attempt to cope through improvisations, without reconsidering basic strategy or readjusting fundamental policies.⁸²

The idea of 'muddling through' has been recently adopted by such scholars as Marcus Noland and Nicholas Eberstadt to explain North Korea's practice of adhering to the status quo through making only incremental changes in their current policies. These authors argue that North Korea will remain inflexible in the face of international pressure and a declining economy, and never take steps to truly reform its economy. It is the assertion of Eberstadt and Noland that North Korea's future not only involves 'muddling through', but it has been 'muddling through' much of the past decade. In actuality, 'muddling through' is an unlikely scenario for North Korea's future (or present) for one reason: change far greater than that which 'muddling through' describes is already occurring in North Korea. The establishment of the Rajin-Sonbong free-trade zone, amendments to the Constitution referring to "private property" and "material incentives", and even further recent changes in North Korea's diplomatic stance⁸³ are all clear indications that North Korea intends to do more than just 'muddle through'—it may be on its way to adopting a slow, gradual reform process.

2. Hard Landing—Explosion

The 'hard landing—explosion' scenario is very similar to the 'hard landing' scenario that was described above. These two scenarios share many of the same characteristics and potential indicators, with one critical difference. In this explosive

⁸² Charles E. Lindblom, "The Science of Muddling Through," Public Policy: The Essential Readings, Ed. by Stella Theodoulou and Matthew Cahn (Prentice Hall: 1995) 113-127.

⁸³ North Korea's recent diplomatic efforts with Italy, Japan, and South Korea will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter V.

scenario, the regime of Kim Jong Il may feel its survival threatened by the growing unrest, instability, and chaos within North Korea and launch either a limited or full-scale attack toward the South. North Korea may launch such an attack to achieve several different objectives: if the North Korean political and military elite saw itself imploding and facing absorption by South Korea, it might be tempted to use force as a means of coercive diplomacy to reduce the threat of retribution;⁸⁴ Kim Jong Il might also launch a desperate pre-emptive attack on the South in a last-ditch effort to hold on to his one bargaining chip in the world, his Army of 1.1 million.⁸⁵

This type of explosive ‘hard landing’ scenario is the least favored of any future scenarios for North Korea because of the considerable toll that a military conflict would exact on South Korea. However, such a scenario is highly unlikely to occur for two interrelated reasons. First, the regime of Kim Jong Il and its followers values one thing above all else—their own survival. In the event that North Korea did launch a major war, its forces would be so badly damaged by South Korean and US forces in the initial unsuccessful assault that they would later be incapable of adequately defending their own territory and ensuring the survival of the Kim Jong Il regime.⁸⁶ Secondly, the military itself must also be concerned with its own survival, and have a keen awareness that, as former US Secretary of State William Perry phrased it, “there is no military calculus that would suggest to the North Koreans anything but catastrophe from armed conflict.”⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Manning. 604.

⁸⁵ Newman. 3.

⁸⁶ Michael O’Hanlon. 137.

⁸⁷ William J. Perry, “Review of United States Policy Toward North Korea: Findings and Recommendations”, October 12, 1999. 3. <http://www.state.gov/www/regions/eap/991012_northkorea_rpt.html>.

V. THE ARGUMENT FOR A 'SOFT LANDING'

A. Introduction

Predicting the future of North Korea is a difficult task, especially given the closed and unpredictable nature of the North Korean regime. The nation's declining economy, years of famine, and surge in defectors and refugees have lead many North Korea experts to conclude that a collapse, or 'hard landing', is the most likely scenario for North Korea's future. However, there are clear signs that Kim Jong Il still has a solid power base in the military, and leads a regime that is firmly in control of North Korea, making a collapse seem unlikely. There are also external influences exerted by the United States, South Korea, China and Japan in the form of food aid and diplomatic pressure that are intended to ensure that a 'hard landing' does not befall North Korea.

In my view, it is the 'soft landing' scenario that has the most realistic possibility of occurring in North Korea's future. There are small changes evident in North Korea that indicate a gradual movement toward more liberal market practices, though on a small scale. There is also the undeniable pacifying influence that the presence of western relief workers throughout the country is having. However, the driving force behind my assertion is the 'sunshine' policy of North Korea engagement advocated by South Korean President Kim Dae Jung, and the recent actions of the United States that support such a policy. The effects of President Kim's policy can already be seen in the increased economic and cultural cooperation between North and South Korea, and in the recent efforts of Pyongyang to improve diplomatic relations with a number of nations. By far

the clearest sign that North Korea is starting on the path toward a 'soft landing' is the recent agreement to hold a summit with South Korea in June of 2000.

B. The 'Sunshine' Policy

The main factor that will lead to a 'soft landing' in North Korea is the implementation of the 'sunshine' policy of North Korea engagement by South Korea since 1997. The primary objective of President Kim Dae Jung's 'sunshine' policy is to improve intra-Korean relations by promoting peace, reconciliation, and cooperation between the two nations. This policy is built upon three basic principles. The first principle is that no armed provocation by North Korea will be tolerated. In this aspect, the 'sunshine' policy is similar to previous hard-line policies toward North Korea, and indicates to the North Koreans that although South Korea is seeking peaceful engagement, it has not completely let its guard down. The second principle states that a takeover or absorption of North Korea will not be attempted. By stating this intention not to absorb the North or encourage its collapse, the Kim administration is able to mitigate the fear and apprehension in the North when confronted with its economically superior Southern neighbor. Denial of such intentions by South Korea is designed to put the North at ease and reduce any threat to the survival of the current regime. The third principle is to actively pursue reconciliation and cooperation between the two countries.⁸⁸ In keeping with this principle, President Kim has supported the expansion of cultural and academic

⁸⁸ North Korea Policy of the Kim Dae-Jung Administration, Republic of Korea Ministry of Unification, October 22, 1999, <<http://www.unikorea.go.kr/eg/load/C31/C315.htm>>. 1.

exchanges, economic projects, and an exchange of special envoys between North and South Korea.⁸⁹

The 'sunshine' policy also outlines specific guidelines and directions for its implementation. Two of these guidelines and directions in particular are crucial to inducing a 'soft landing' in North Korea. 'Creation of an environment conducive to reform in North Korea' is an obvious invitation to the North to reform itself with the help of the South. The administration will not try to force change on North Korea, but simply maintain its composure in the face of irrational demands or threats from the North, and steadfastly endeavor to increase contacts, expand dialogue, and create an atmosphere favorable to reform in North Korea.⁹⁰

'Separation of business from politics' is another critical step toward bringing a 'soft landing' to North Korea. In taking such a stance, the South is giving private businesses the freedom, which they have not previously enjoyed, to directly engage North Korea in business. The administration has encouraged South Korean businessmen to visit North Korea, raised the ceiling on the size of investment in North Korea by South Korean businesses, and simplified the legal procedures for intra-Korean interaction. One of the first and most visible examples of this principle was the delivery of 500 head of cattle in June 1998 by the head of the Hyundai motor corporation. Since that time a variety of deals have been struck between the North Koreans and South Korean businesses. Such deals include the South Korean supervised production of electronics

⁸⁹ Young Whan Kihl, "Seoul's Engagement Policy and US-DPRK Relations," Korean Journal of Defense Analysis, vXn1 (1998) 3.

⁹⁰ North Korea Policy of the Kim Dae-Jung Administration, 2.

and cigarettes in North Korea for sale in the South,⁹¹ and the establishment of the Kumgang mountain tourism project, which allows South Koreans to travel to this famous site in North Korea. The 'separation of business from politics' is an important and effective way to create much needed income for North Korea, and induces the North Koreans to relinquish their dealings in missile technology, drugs, and counterfeit currency, in favor of more peaceful, legitimate commerce.

While no single aspect of the 'sunshine' policy can lead North Korea toward a 'soft landing', it is the combination of openness, genuine desire for cooperation and reconciliation, and increased economic engagement free from political constraints that will slowly encourage North Korea to seek significant internal reform of its own accord. Korean scholar David Reese argues that Kim Dae Jung's strategy towards the North is the correct approach. While maintaining security as a priority, Kim is trying to create a climate in which commercial links can improve, hopefully cracking the stubborn character of North Korea.⁹² As progress continues to be made on nonpolitical and more practical exchanges such as economic, cultural, and academic exchanges, attempts at more serious political and military cooperation can subsequently be ventured upon.⁹³ It is believed that this "cautious and gradual approach to the DPRK by [South Korea] under [Kim's] leadership, in the short run, will pay off and bring progress in inter-Korean dialogue".⁹⁴ With inter-Korean dialogue will ultimately come trust and familiarity between the two Koreas, and in the long run gradual reform can be initiated by the North, with the encouragement of the South.

⁹¹ "Samsung Electronics to Market Products made in North Korea," *Asia Pulse*, April 10, 2000, <http://www.library.northernlight.com/FD20000410700000086.html?no_highlight=1>.

⁹² Reese. 82

⁹³ Kihl. 7.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 6.

C. US Engagement

Kim Dae Jung and his 'sunshine' policy alone are slowly making a difference in affecting the future of North Korea, and can ultimately lead to a 'soft landing'. An additional driving force that makes a 'soft landing' even more likely in the years to come is recent efforts by the United States to treat North Korea on more equal footing with the South, and to seek more normal relations. Although the United States has not embraced an engagement policy as comprehensive as that of South Korea's 'sunshine' policy, it has made visible and persistent efforts to engage North Korea both diplomatically and economically.

The primary interest of the United States with respect to North Korea continues to be eventually capping and eliminating the threat of DPRK nuclear weapons. Accordingly, the Agreed Framework of 1994 remains central to US engagement policy toward the DPRK.⁹⁵ This agreement calls on South Korea and Japan to finance 70 percent of the cost of two proliferation-resistant, light-water nuclear reactors, and calls on the US to provide 500,000 metric tons of heavy fuel oil to the North annually to replace the loss of energy from North Korean reactors until the first new reactor comes on line. This is in return for North Korea keeping its nuclear activities at Yongbyon and Taechon frozen. Despite some delays in getting funds arranged and several other diplomatic delays, the Korean Energy Development Organization (KEDO) is now ready to move forward with actual construction of the two reactors.⁹⁶ The US has also, as of August 1, 1999, provided 1.9 million metric tons of heavy fuel oil to North Korea to meet its power

⁹⁵ Wendy R. Sherman, "Sherman on US Policy toward North Korea," US Department of State, March 21, 2000. <http://www.state.gov/www/policy_remarks/2000/000321_sherman_nkorea.html>.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

needs.⁹⁷ North Korea is continuing to comply with its own obligations under the agreement, to include canning of spent fuel rods, and resumption of North-South dialogue. In addition to the obvious benefit of freezing the North Korean nuclear program, the Agreed Framework has served to increase the level of cooperation between the US and North Korea, and opened a new avenue of technology and development in North Korea, laying the groundwork for a 'soft landing' in the North.

In November 1998 President Clinton tasked former Secretary of State William Perry to conduct a review of US policy toward the DPRK. In the resulting report, Perry recommended a strategy of reducing pressures on the DPRK that it perceives as threatening. This reduction of perceived threat would in turn give the DPRK regime the confidence to pursue its own economic and social development.⁹⁸ As the first step in allowing North Korea the freedom to reform economically, President Clinton lifted a wide range of economic and trade sanctions on North Korea in September 1999, virtually putting an end to the classification of the North as an 'enemy state' to the US.⁹⁹ The US has also recently engaged in high-level talks with North Korea in Berlin, in hopes of negotiating high-level official visits between the two countries, as well as the establishment of diplomatic offices in Pyongyang and Washington. No firm agreement has been reached, but progress continues to be made toward this goal. The actions that have already been taken by the US toward North Korea indicate that the US policy of North Korea engagement will be as successful as that of Kim Dae Jung. Of equal importance to the prospect of inducing a 'soft landing' in North Korea is that the US not

⁹⁷ Congressional Report on North Korean Threat. 32.

⁹⁸ William J. Perry. 8.

⁹⁹ Key-Yong Son, "US Lifts Economic Sanctions on NK," Korea Times Online, September 17, 1999. 1. <<http://search.korealink.co.kr/>>.

rest on the laurels of its current successes, or let its guard down, but continue to engage North Korea firmly, fairly, and persistently to urge the North to gradually open its doors to the international community.

D. Recent Change in North Korea

South Korea's 'sunshine' policy, and the shift in US policy toward engaging North Korea have already resulted in clear signs that North Korea is moving towards a future 'soft landing'. But perhaps the clearest signs of a future 'soft landing' are coming from inside North Korea itself. North Korea has recently shown significant signs of turning its economy around, albeit with the continued help of international aid; and has made remarkable strides to engage a handful of nations diplomatically, to include the announcement of a future summit meeting with South Korea.

After recording nine years of successive economic decline, the North Korean economy is showing signs of recovering. A survey of South Korean research institutes indicates that the DPRK economy grew by up to 3 percent in 1999, the first signs of positive growth in ten years. The rebound was propelled largely by the influx of steady foreign aid and a recovery in agricultural and manufacturing output. The same survey revealed that North Korea's agricultural output grew by 40 percent from a year earlier. This rebound reflects a shift in economic policy in the North to pragmatism and an inflow of foreign aid.¹⁰⁰

Other economic signs that portend a movement toward reform in North Korea are the previously mentioned establishment of the Rajin-Sonbong free-trade zone and the

¹⁰⁰ "DPRK's Economy on the Up," *China Daily*, March 23, 2000. 1
<<http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndydb/2000/03/d6-4kore.323.html>>.

widespread opening of farmers' markets in recent years. To build upon the lackluster performance of the free-trade zone to date, the North Korean government has opened a business school in the area, and enacted new laws to improve relations with foreign business. North Korea is beginning to view foreign capital no longer as purely instrumental, but as a more integral part of building up its economy.¹⁰¹ This changed perspective on foreign aid and foreign capital will make the transition from reliance on illicit income from the sale of missiles and drugs to reliance on legitimate foreign trade an easier task in North Korea's future. These changes do not constitute market reform as it is generally understood, but do represent an "attempt to square the new international economic reality with the requirements of North Korean sovereignty and the need to reinvigorate the economy."¹⁰²

In the area of foreign policy and diplomatic relations, North Korea has shifted its focus away from the communist bloc and the Third World and toward the United States, Europe, Japan, and South Korea. This signifies that the North has taken a new, pragmatic look at the balance of power in the world and identified the United States as the chief power broker in the Asia-Pacific region.¹⁰³ North Korea has demonstrated its diplomatic ambitions toward Europe recently by quickly and with little fanfare establishing diplomatic relations with Italy, and by sending out discreet feelers to Great Britain. Efforts to engage Canada and resume diplomatic discussions with Australia and the Philippines have also been made by the now diplomatically ambitious North.¹⁰⁴ Japan

¹⁰¹ John Feffer and Karin Lee, "Change in North Korea", Policy Forum Online, The Nautilus Institute, October 19, 1999. 5. <http://www.nautilus.org/fora/security/9907F_Feffer.html>.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Howard W. French, "Suddenly, Reclusive North Korea Reaches Out to the World," New York Times Online, March 17, 2000, Foreign Desk. 1. <<http://www.nytimes.com>> archives search.

and North Korea have recently resumed talks on normalizing relations, and, although a definitive agreement has not yet emerged, progress is being made.

Undoubtedly the most important recent development in North Korea's new diplomacy is the unexpected announcement of an upcoming summit with South Korea in June of 2000. If such an event takes place, it will be the first meeting between heads of state of the two Koreas since the Korean War. Topics for discussion at this historic meeting will include economic cooperation, reunification of separated families, and political reconciliation.¹⁰⁵ Recognition by the North that it cannot fully enter the international community without further reconciliation with the South, a desire for further economic assistance that may result from the summit, and the decision to take a more proactive role in ensuring its future sovereignty are all likely factors that influenced North Korea's decision to make this announcement. A summit between the two Koreas will not immediately resolve all issues between the two nations or guarantee an economic reversal of fortune for North Korea, but it represents a momentous change in attitude, and a desire for North Korea to open itself to the outside world while still maintaining the integrity of its regime.

E. Conclusion

The current situation in North Korea is still a bleak one. Years of famine have claimed hundreds of thousands of lives, and the economy has been in a steady state of decline that only recently has been arrested. Despite this, the North Korean regime has continued to survive, but not without sparking a flurry of predictions about its impending

¹⁰⁵ Howard W. French, "Two Koreas Agree to First Meeting of their Leaders," New York Times Online, April 10, 2000, Foreign Desk. 1. <<http://www.nytimes.com>> archives search.

collapse. It has been postulated that the North may fall victim to a 'hard landing' and fall into chaos and internal disorder. It has also been suggested that North Korea may open itself to the outside world, reform its economy, and reconcile with the international community in a 'soft landing' scenario. It can be argued that this last possibility, the 'soft landing', is the most likely to occur in the coming years. The internal and external indicators of such an outcome are already present. The driving external force behind such a 'soft landing' in North Korea is the 'sunshine' policy of Kim Dae Jung, and its objectives of reducing tension between the two Koreas and creating an environment for peaceful North Korean reform. Actions by the US in conjunction with the Agreed Framework, and in pursuit of improved diplomatic relations with the North add to the likelihood of a 'soft landing'. The recent diplomatic reaching out of North Korea toward the US, Japan, Europe, and South Korea indicates that the internal decision to open itself gradually has been made by the North Koreans as well. While the ultimate achievement of a 'soft landing' in North Korea's future still lies in the hands of the North Koreans, continued pursuit of firm-handed engagement with North Korea is the key to keeping it on the path toward a 'soft landing'. Engagement that refrains from threatening the sovereignty of North Korea or the survival of the Kim Jong Il regime, and provides the economic incentive to North Korea to discard its nuclear program and missile sales, by South Korea, the United States, and the rest of the international community will make a 'soft landing' in North Korea a future inevitability.

Part II: Implications for the United States Army

VI. Factors Affecting Future US Army Operations on the Korean Peninsula

A. Introduction

Most of the writings that can be found concerning the US military presence on the Korean Peninsula have been undertaken as a discussion of whether US forces should remain in Korea after Korean reunification. However, it is becoming more and more apparent that the two Koreas are years away from reunification. The US military would be better served at this juncture to examine the events that may take place in the event of either a 'hard landing' or a 'soft landing' scenario as discussed previously in this document, and the implications that these situations will have for the United States Army.

In the following pages, I will outline the factors that could possibly affect the operations of the United States Army on the Korean Peninsula in the event of either a 'hard landing' or 'soft landing'. The two factors that will have the most favorable influence on future army operations in Korea are the current US security strategy in Asia, and the current US-South Korea security relationship. I will also touch upon two issues that will be of particular concern when planning future US Army actions on the Korean Peninsula: the role of China, and the presence of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles in North Korea. Keeping these factors in mind, I will again address the two most likely scenarios for North Korea's future, the 'hard landing' and the 'soft landing', and detail the implications and essential tasks that each of these scenarios entails for the US Army. A thoughtful and intelligent appraisal of these implications and tasks will ensure that the

US Army is adequately prepared for any contingency that may arise on the Korean Peninsula.

B. US Security Strategy in Asia

The United States believes in maintaining a strong, forward military presence in the Asia-Pacific region. The primary role of US military presence in Asia is to promote a stable, secure, prosperous and peaceful Asia-Pacific community in which the United States is an active player, partner and beneficiary.¹⁰⁶ The size of the US military force in Asia currently totals approximately 100,000 personnel, and represents the appropriate force level necessary to meet all contingency requirements in the strategic environment in Asia. The presence of 100,000 military personnel in Asia is not arbitrary- it represents the capabilities of the US Eighth Army and Seventh Air Force in South Korea, III Marine Expeditionary Force and Fifth Air Force in Japan, and the US Seventh Fleet. These forces are all focused on shaping, responding, and preparing as necessary to achieve security and stability in the Asia-Pacific region, as advocated in the Department of Defense's 1997 Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review.¹⁰⁷

The US Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific region is officially referred to as "presence plus". It reflects that the overall US strategy for Asia includes the US force *presence*, *plus* the additional elements of conventional diplomacy, international trade and people-to-people contacts in educational, scientific, and cultural exchanges. As just one aspect of the overall security strategy in Asia, the US military bases in Japan and Korea in particular represent a critical conflict deterrent and provide a rapid response capability

¹⁰⁶ "U.S. Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region," American Asian Review, v17n3, (1998). 105

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

in the region. Forces throughout Asia, to include the Korean Peninsula, are task-organized with the diversity and flexibility to respond to a broad spectrum of conflict scenarios. However, in order to foster peace, create transparency, and build confidence in the region, US forces are involved in a variety of humanitarian assistance projects, military exchanges, peacekeeping operations, and regional security discussions. Given the current level of uncertainty on the Korean Peninsula, US Forces in Korea, as well as Japan, are prepared to engage North Korea in the future as either enemy or otherwise using the appropriate elements of this security strategy for East Asia.

C. US-South Korea Security Relationship

The implications and essential tasks for the US Army in response to a future North Korean 'hard landing' or 'soft landing' will likely involve close cooperation with South Korean military forces as well. Therefore, it is essential that the two nations maintain a close, mutually supportive security relationship. The current US-South Korea security relationship is such a relationship, and is comprised of three basic elements: the 1953 Mutual Defense Treaty, bilateral consultations, and combined military forces.¹⁰⁸ The Mutual Defense Treaty of 1953 was signed after the Korean War, and has served as the foundation for future cooperation between the US and South Korea. The two most important articles of the treaty address the mutual consultation between the US and South Korea when the security of either party is threatened, and the agreement of South Korea to allow the stationing of US forces on Korean soil.¹⁰⁹ Since the Korean War the US-

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 112.

¹⁰⁹ Ernest Graves, "ROK-US Security Cooperation: Current Status," in The Future of South Korean-US Security Relations, eds. William J. Taylor, Jr., Young Koo Cha, John Q. Blodgett, and Michael Mazarr (Boulder: Westview, 1989) 15.

South Korea security relationship has undergone many changes, but still remains focused on promoting democracy and stability on the Korean Peninsula, and deterring North Korean aggression. The United States and South Korea maintain a close dialogue on security issues affecting the peninsula, in order to present a united and unequivocal deterrence to the current North Korean threat. The most significant result of such a firm stance by the United States and the Republic of Korea (ROK) was the 1994 Agreed Framework, which froze North Korean nuclear facilities. The United States currently has stationed in South Korea 37,000 personnel, many of which operate as part of the Combined Forces Command (CFC), a combined ROK-US force that possesses the capabilities to deter and defeat North Korean aggression.

In recent years the US role in the ROK-US security alliance has further solidified, in the wake of remarks from South Korean President Kim Dae Jung that a US presence in Korea will be welcome well into Korea's future, and as the two nations respond to the test launching of a North Korean ballistic missile over Japan in 1998. The latter issue, along with the continued possibility of North Korea reviving its nuclear program, remains one of the primary security concerns of the United States and South Korea. As part of their continued alliance, the US and ROK military forces continue to train and modernize to provide a strong deterrent to the possibility of North Korean aggression, while also seeking to engage the North in productive dialogue to peacefully end the stalemate on the Korean Peninsula.

D. The Role of China

One unknown factor in determining the implications that a future North Korean 'hard landing' or 'soft landing' will have for the US Army is the role that China will play in these future scenarios. China has long enjoyed the presence of North Korea as a buffer state between the US influence in South Korea and its own borders. Accordingly, it can be expected to voice strong opposition to a US presence north of the DMZ to provide peacekeeping forces in the event of a North Korean collapse, or as part of a military exchange in the event of a 'soft landing'. To Beijing, the idea of an American military force just on the other side of the Yalu River would be both frightening and intolerable.¹¹⁰ However, there is the remote possibility that China may prefer the US influence in a collapsed or opened North Korea to control the rise of a new Korean nationalism in the future.

It can be expected that China will want to increase its own influence on the Korean Peninsula in the event of either North Korean scenario, both to counter any US influence, and to further its own diplomatic and economic aims. China will also become involved directly in the event of a North Korean 'hard landing', as the recipient of waves of refugees fleeing the collapsed North. The future reaction of China with regards to North Korea's future and implications for the US Army does not necessarily pose a threat to the variety of possibilities that US forces may pursue, but will definitely figure into planning and discussions when determining future courses of action. Because of their interest in maintaining their power in Northeast Asia, China can be expected to take significant interest in North Korea, and US military actions, after a future hard or soft landing.

¹¹⁰ Fei-Ling Wang. 194.

E. The Nuclear Weapon/Ballistic Missile Problem

The status of North Korea's WMD and ballistic missile programs continues to be the primary focus of continued US engagement with North Korea. These programs pose a real threat to the security of US forces in South Korea, as well as the nations of Northeast Asia. The North Korean nuclear program has been frozen since 1994, although stories to the contrary have been told by North Korean defectors such as former high-ranking government official Hwang Jang Yop. US inspections of nuclear facilities in Kumchangni in 1999, however, indicate that the North is complying with the Agreed Framework of 1994, and is not pursuing nuclear weapons related activities.¹¹¹ North Korea's agreement last fall to refrain from testing any more ballistic missiles has mitigated the threat that these weapons pose to US forces and the peninsula, but has not removed the threat altogether.

When determining the implications and essential tasks for the US Army in responding to a future 'hard landing' or 'soft landing' in North Korea, the North's ability to restart its nuclear program, and the presence of ballistic missiles in North Korea will figure high on the list of concerns for the US military. A 'hard landing' that results in internal chaos and a lack of reliable control over North Korea's WMD and ballistic missile capabilities may require immediate and drastic action by US forces to eliminate these capabilities from being misused. A 'soft landing', although far more favorable an outcome for North Korea, will still require deft negotiation and coercion to ensure that North Korea peacefully relinquishes its hold on its weapons programs. In either case, this issue will be of the utmost importance to planners and military leaders when addressing the implications for the US Army with respect to North Korea's future.

¹¹¹ Wendy R. Sherman. 2

VII. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE US ARMY

A. Hard Landing

As previously discussed in this thesis, the 'hard landing' scenario is the least favorable scenario for the future of North Korea, and the least likely to occur given the current situation. However valid that judgment may be, it is made from a more pragmatic, political perspective. When looking at the future of North Korea from the perspective of the US Army, although a 'soft landing' still remains the favorable course of action, a 'hard landing' must be considered an equally realistic possibility and prepared for. The assumptions made with respect to a North Korean collapse that the US military must prepare for are that society will be in disarray and chaos; the North Korean people will still be lacking the food, fuel, and medicines that they need to survive; the North Korean military will be very much intact, and perhaps hostile toward any peacekeeping force; and the security of nuclear weapons and ballistic missile-related facilities and equipment will be questionable. In the following pages I will outline the implications and tasks that will confront the US Army in dealing with this future 'hard landing' scenario.

The main actor in a future 'hard landing' scenario in North Korea will most certainly be South Korea. However, as a result of the close cooperation between the ROK and US forces and the Mutual Defense Treaty existing between the two countries, the US will be intimately involved in dealing with a collapsed North Korea. Although the presence of 37,000 US personnel in South Korea may make it difficult to keep US influence out of the situation, the ROK has three choices in how to deal with a fallen North Korea. They may go it alone, and attempt to bear the full burden of dealing with

North Korea, both militarily and financially.¹¹² This is an option that the South Koreans may truly want to pursue, viewing the resolution of this catastrophic scenario as something that must be accomplished only between the two Koreas. Most likely, however, the South will not be willing to shoulder the huge financial burden that policing and restoring a collapsed North Korea will surely carry. South Korea may engage in a bilateral alliance with either the US, China, or Russia. However, such a relationship would most likely be objected to by other nations, as it allows whichever country conducts the operation to have an increased chance at influencing the region.¹¹³ The ROK may also allow the United Nations to take the lead in providing humanitarian assistance and stability to North Korea, and allow a coalition force to keep security and peace in the region. This last option may prove to be the best for dealing with a collapsed North. It would spread the cost of securing and stabilizing the area among many nations, and the consensus approach would prevent any one nation from gaining a position of dominance in the region.¹¹⁴

Under the auspices of a United Nations coalition force, which would initially be the method most likely preferred by the international community, the United States Army would bear considerable responsibility. In concert with the other nations involved, there are a number of tasks that would need to be undertaken to restore the stability of North Korea and begin to rebuild its infrastructure. The establishment of security and stability is the first task that must be undertaken in order to prevent any further internal conflict, and to create a stable environment of law and order within the borders of North Korea to

¹¹² David S. Maxwell, "Catastrophic Collapse of North Korea: Implications for the United States Military," School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College, 1996. 20-21.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

allow further operations. The provision of humanitarian assistance to the suffering North Korean population would occur shortly after, or simultaneously with the establishment of security. The presence of non-governmental organizations in North Korea already as part of current humanitarian assistance efforts would allow immediate aid to be provided to the North Korean people where they live. By bringing the aid to the people where they live, they can be induced to stay put, to lessen their desire to flee across North Korean borders into China, South Korea, or Russia. If adequate aid is provided quickly to the North Korean population, the potential for further outbreak of civil strife can be dramatically reduced.¹¹⁵

The one task in which all the major powers have a common interest is the securing of nuclear weapons and ballistic missile related facilities and equipment. The rapid and thorough accomplishment of this task will ensure that nuclear material or ballistic missiles do not fall into the hands of terrorists or a hostile successor regime. The weapons related nuclear material will have to be secured and disposed of in a verifiable manner. This will be a significant military operation, and will involve the presence of representatives of all the major powers as well as the assistance of the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency.¹¹⁶ Ballistic missiles, their facilities and related equipment would also need to be secured, disarmed, and destroyed. If a coalition force cannot peacefully accomplish such actions, the use of military force to accomplish these crucial tasks may be necessary.

A related and equally critical task is the disarming and demobilizing of the DPRK military. The continued presence of the 1.1 million man DPRK military would be a

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 22

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

major destabilizing factor in the North in the event of a 'hard landing'. If the military were allowed to continue to exist in its present form, it would certainly constitute a center of gravity for the formation of a successor regime. The delicate operation of getting the North Korean military to lay down its arms would have to be done through careful negotiation in both diplomatic and military channels. Backing up these negotiations with a highly capable coalition deterrent force should they fail, and providing the North Korean military with its own humanitarian assistance would reduce the likelihood of conflict and ensure that the North Korean military can be peacefully disarmed.¹¹⁷

The main implication for the US Army in the event of a 'hard landing' in North Korea is that it should be prepared to act as part of a coalition force that occupies North Korea under the auspices of the United Nations. The army must be prepared to conduct any of the tasks mentioned above, or assist with their completion. The army must also be prepared to deal with the sensitive nature of US forces operating north of the DMZ for the first time in more than 50 years. China and the North Korean people may not initially be very receptive to such a US presence.

The force structure that the US provides to a coalition force would be primarily infantry, augmented by logistics, aviation, engineer, medical, military police, and intelligence units. Command of the coalition force would be a delicate issue to be determined later, but with equal representation given to China, South Korea, the United States, and Russia. Given the nature of previous Japan-Korea relations, Japan would only participate financially in supporting such a coalition. US Army forces that are involved in responding to a future 'hard landing' in North Korea must be initially prepared to use force against the North Korean military and to use a firm hand when confronting the

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

initial unrest and instability that will exist in the North. However, as hostilities are reduced, and security is established, US forces must be prepared to look beyond the years of hostility and confrontation that has existed across the DMZ, and treat the North Koreans as a nation and a people in need of assistance, reform, and rebuilding. With such a cautiously positive outlook on the part of the US Army, an environment of peaceful coexistence can ultimately be restored to the Korean Peninsula.

B. Soft Landing

The 'soft landing' scenario is the preferred future for North Korea when viewed from diplomatic, political, and military perspectives. It can be argued that a 'soft landing' is already beginning to occur in North Korea based on the facts presented in the first part of this thesis, although at a very slow and cautious pace. Given the nature of a 'soft landing' and its much broader timeline when compared to the sudden collapse involved in a 'hard landing', the essential tasks and implications for the US Army in the event of a 'soft landing' are far less defined and may necessitate a more subtle approach.

The assumptions made with respect to a 'soft landing' in North Korea are that the North will gradually open itself to increased diplomatic and economic dealings with South Korea and the rest of the international community; the plight of the North Korean people will slowly improve, lessening the urgency for providing humanitarian assistance; the military will continue to remain a large part of North Korean society, although gradual efforts will be taken to reduce its size and capabilities as part of a bi-lateral agreement with the South; and the North will open itself to a creating a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula, and discontinuing its ballistic missile program. Despite such

optimistic assumptions for North Korea during and after a 'soft landing', these changes will not occur overnight. It will be essential for the US Army to work together with South Korean and North Korean forces to ensure that the transformation from hostile stalemate to peaceful coexistence on the Korean Peninsula occurs smoothly.

The primary goals of US Army operations in response to a North Korean 'soft landing' will be to increase transparency, communication, and cooperation between all military forces on the Korean Peninsula. These goals can best be achieved through the implementation of various confidence-building measures. These confidence-building measures are designed to reestablish mutual trust and cooperation between the two Koreas. The United States Army may be able to play a facilitating role in overseeing their implementation. These measures would also serve to reduce the tensions that exist between the US and North Korea, which have formed during more than 50 years of facing each other across the DMZ.

Confidence-building measures to be emplaced between the two Koreas, and the US, would most likely include the following:

- establishing a military hotline between North and South Korea to allow more direct communication in the event of a crisis, and as a means to defuse such a crisis if one should occur. The establishing of a hotline would also carry with it obvious political and symbolic significance.¹¹⁸
- mutual visits and exchanges of military personnel between North Korea, South Korea, and the US.

¹¹⁸ Kang Choi, "Inter-Korean Confidence Building," The Four Powers and Korean Reunification Strategies, ed. Tae-Hwan Kwak (Seoul: Kyungnam University Press, 1997) 213.

- the extending of invitations to watch US/ROK military exercises, as well as sending observers to watch DPRK exercises.
- demilitarization of the DMZ, as a basis for future arms limitation and reduction discussions.
- notification in advance of major troop movements or military exercises.
- continued progress in compliance with the Agreed Framework, and mutual agreement to cease ballistic missile development.

Similar confidence building measures are already in place between the US and Chinese Armies, and have had a tremendous impact in building up healthy Sino-US relations. Such measures between the US and China will play an important role in increasing mutual understanding and military openness.¹¹⁹ Likewise, the adoption of similar confidence building measures on the Korean Peninsula will have the positive effects of increasing transparency, stability, and cooperation between the military forces of North Korea, South Korea, and the United States.

The most important implication for the US Army in the event of a future 'soft landing' in North Korea has nothing to do with capabilities or force structure or readiness. It involves US and South Korean forces changing their frame of mind from viewing the North Koreans as enemies to viewing the North Koreans in a new light. I don't mean to suggest that as a 'soft landing' takes hold in North Korea that a wave of friendship and goodwill should sweep over US and South Korean forces. But as North Korea embarks toward reform, gradual opening, and participation in confidence building measures, in turn the US Army's perception of the North Koreans must change. To paraphrase

¹¹⁹ Hongwei, Bian, "Military Co-operation Spurs Stability," China Daily, January 7, 1999. 1.

Defense Secretary William Cohen, who has made this comment with respect to China, “if we treat [North Korea] as an enemy today, we are guaranteed an enemy for the future.”¹²⁰

Surely the prejudices and stereotypes that have been formed about North Koreans during the 50-year stalemate on the Korean Peninsula will not fall easily, but they must fall. In advocating this change in mindset for US Army forces, I assume that the North Koreans will also recognize this implication, and will change their own mindset as well. The indoctrination of the Juch’e ideology and the view of Americans as inhuman imperialists must disappear from the North Korean mentality if a ‘soft landing’ is to reach its full completion. The psychological barriers that have been constructed in the minds of US, South Korean, and North Korean forces may be the most difficult of all to tear down. If US Army forces are able to embrace the concept that they must lose their stereotypes and preconceptions of the North Koreans, and begin to see them in a new light, then improved communication and cooperation with this former enemy will naturally follow, and lead to the establishment of peaceful coexistence on the Korean Peninsula.

C. Conclusion and Recommendations

United States Army forces currently enjoy a level of modernization and readiness unparalleled in the history of their presence in South Korea. They are prepared to deal quickly and successfully with any contingency that may occur in the course of maintaining peace on the Korean Peninsula. The forces of the US Army are very well prepared even now to respond to any of the future North Korean scenarios that have been discussed in this thesis. In the event of a ‘hard landing’ in North Korea, the main implication for the US Army is that they will have to act as part of a coalition force under

¹²⁰ Ibid. 3.

the auspices of the United Nations in order to establish security and stability, provide humanitarian assistance, disarm and demobilize the North Korean military, and secure nuclear weapons and ballistic missile facilities. As a result of other peacekeeping operations that the army has conducted elsewhere in the world, US forces are quite familiar with operating as part of a UN peacekeeping force or other coalition force. The soldiers of the US Army will also have to learn to view the North Koreans no longer as enemies but a people in need of assistance and protection. In the event of a 'soft landing' in North Korea's future, US Army forces, along with South Korean forces, will need to implement confidence-building measures to increase transparency, cooperation, and communication with North Korean forces. The US Army is quite familiar with such measures, as it conducts military exchanges and information sharing with other foreign militaries around the world. Overall, the US Army possesses the technical, tactical, and logistical capabilities to successfully conduct operations in support of establishing a peaceful environment on the Korean Peninsula in the future.

However, the primary implication for the US Army in dealing with a North Korean 'soft landing' is the adopting of a new mindset, one that views the North Koreans no longer as enemies, but as something different. Perhaps not friends, but former adversaries with which to now communicate, exchange information, and cooperate. The adopting of a new frame of mind is also necessary for US forces when responding to a 'hard landing', but to a lesser extent given the more impersonal nature of their tasks. It is this implication, and a failure to address it that may hinder the US Army's ability to act accordingly in response to future scenarios in North Korea.

I have seen first hand the tension and hostility that facing an enemy across the DMZ for decades can instill in soldiers. The army effectively harnesses this mentality, and uses it to create highly trained warriors who are fit and prepared to face this enemy on the battlefield. But the 'soft landing' and the 'hard landing' do not involve confrontation on a battlefield, and that is my concern. US Army forces in Korea have been so well prepared to meet and defeat the North Korean military in combat, that they may be ill-prepared to face the North Koreans in an environment where the aim is to foster mutual trust and understanding. In response to this possible shortcoming, it is my recommendation that a program of education and familiarization be created that addresses background information on North Korea and the details of the North Korean current situation similar to what I have presented in this thesis. By presenting this information to soldiers before they engage their former enemy in this new environment, they can gain a firmer understanding of the North Koreans, their motivations, and their values. With this knowledge in hand, the forces of the US Army will be better prepared to engage the North Koreans in a genuine and forthright manner, and promote a lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula.

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Appendix A: Comprehensive Logic Diagram

The Future of North Korea

The future of North Korea can best be determined by viewing a framework consisting of four key factors: diplomacy, economy, military, and societal conditions. Within this framework, the driving forces, characteristics, and indicators of both the 'hard landing' and 'soft landing' scenarios can be addressed; and as events unfold in North Korea's future, a logical decision can be made as to which path is most likely to be followed.

Hard Landing		Soft Landing
<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Increased isolationism-Withdrawal from international talks and activities	Diplomacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Improved North-South relations-Increased diplomatic efforts to engage Int'l community
<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Refusal to adopt further reforms-Continued economic decline-Lack of economic cooperation with the South or other nations.	Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Continued adoption of limited reforms-Gradual expansion of economic cooperation with South Korea-Increased foreign investment
<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Increased buildup of military forces near DMZ-Movement of military officers into key party positions-Further test firing of ballistic missiles.	Military	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Increased transparency on the part of the DPRK military-Participation in Confidence Building Measures-Drawdown in force strength and capabilities
<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Worsening famine-Expelling of NGOs and international relief organizations.-Growing civil unrest-Increased defections and refugees	Societal Conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Improvement in famine conditions-Opening country to further international assistance-Reduced defections-Increased cultural exchange between North and South-Allowance of North/South travel and family reunions